

Field Report

Boston National Historical Park and Boston African-American National Historic Site

■ **1.0 Site Description**

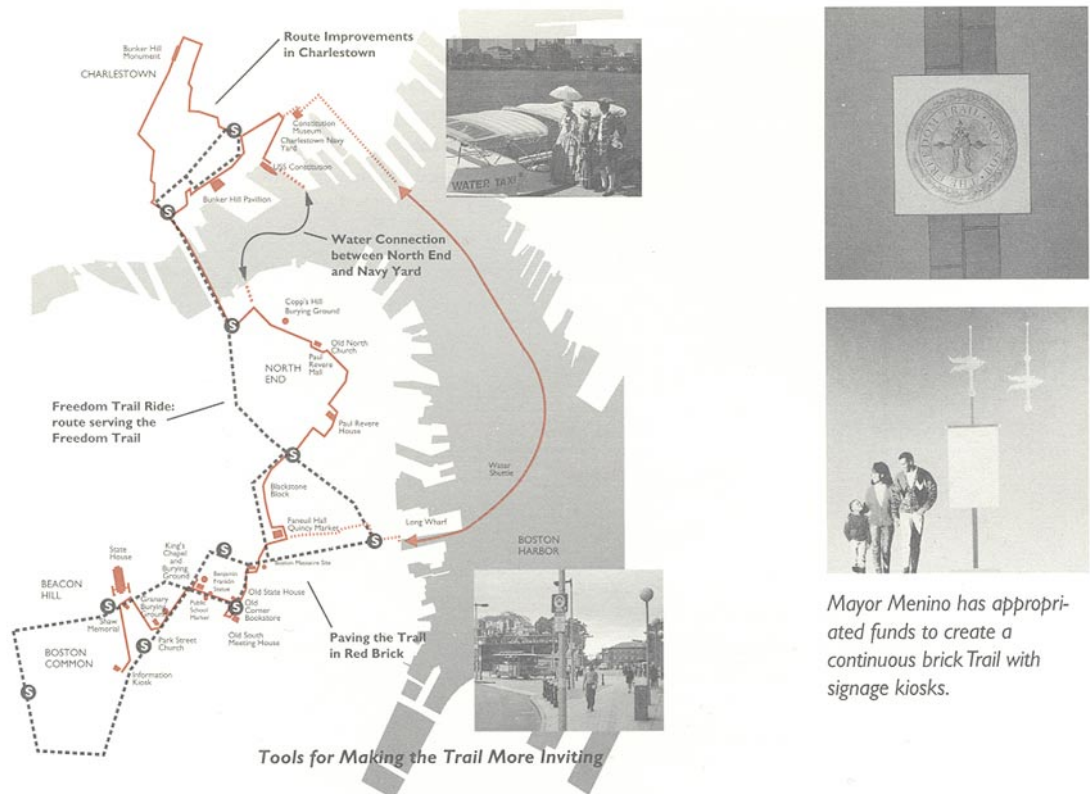
Boston National Historical Park (NHP), established in 1974, is an association of sites that together provide a coherent view of the City's role in U.S. history, with emphasis on the period leading up to and including the Revolutionary War. As stated in the Park's brochure, "each site brings to life the American ideals of freedom of speech, religion, government and self-determination." The major elements of the Boston NHP are the Freedom Trail, the Charlestown Navy Yard and the Bunker Hill Monument. The latter two sites, and the Dorchester Heights Monument in South Boston, are the only three Park sites actually owned by the federal government. Either the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the City of Boston or private entities own the other sites.

The Freedom Trail is a 2.5-mile walking tour that connects 16 historic sites in downtown Boston and neighboring Charlestown. These sites include some of the most significant in early American history such as the Paul Revere House, the Old North Church, the Old State House, Copp's Hill Burial Ground, the Old South Meeting House, Faneuil Hall, the Massachusetts State House and the Boston Common.

The Charlestown Navy Yard is a 200-year old historic shipyard located across the harbor from downtown Boston. It became part of the Boston NHP after the U.S. Navy closed operations there in 1975. The section of the Navy Yard owned by the NPS includes two historic ships, the U.S.S. Constitution and U.S.S. Cassin Young, a museum and a variety of industrial and residential buildings associated with the Naval presence in the Shipyard. The portion of the Navy Yard not owned by the NPS is under control of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and is being developed as a mixed-use community. The Bunker Hill Monument is located about one-half mile north of the Navy Yard in a residential neighborhood. Figure 1, taken from a 1996 Master Plan prepared for the Freedom Trail, shows a map of key features around Boston harbor.

Since the Freedom Trail brings visitors into contact with many non-historic attractions in downtown Boston, measurement of visitation is difficult. The Park estimates that total visitation for 1998 was 2.814 million, up from 2.660 million in 1997 and 2.193 million in 1996. Attendance for individual components of the Park in 1998 is shown in Table 1.

Figure 1. Map of Boston NHP



Mayor Menino has appropriated funds to create a continuous brick Trail with signage kiosks.



A modest route change would enhance the Trail in Charlestown; a Freedom Trail "Ride" and water connection to Charlestown would strengthen links along the Trail.

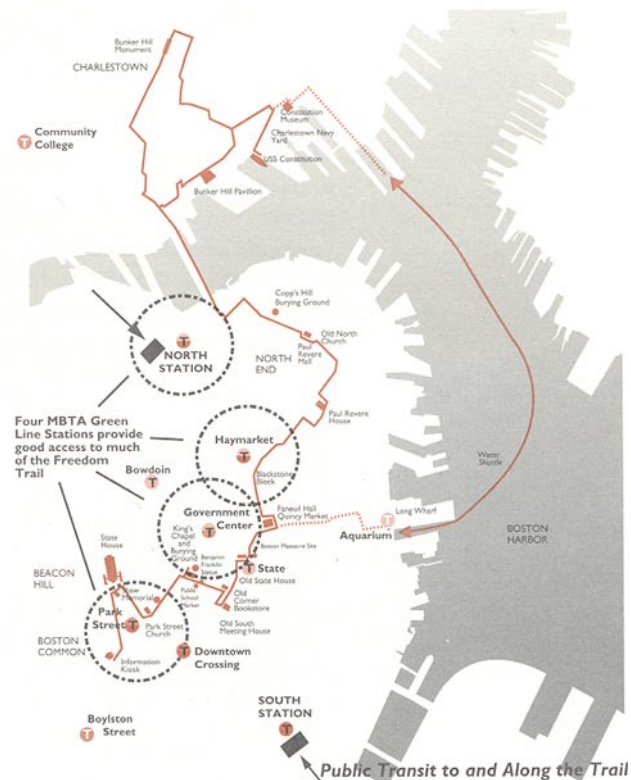


Table 1. Boston National Historical Park Attendance (1998)

Site	Attendance
Bunker Hill Monument	183,600
Faneuil Hall	333,700
Old North Church	544,700
Old South Meeting House	82,300
Old State House	77,700
Paul Revere House	233,100
Downtown Visitor Center	341,200
Charlestown Navy Yard	1,096,100
Constitution Museum	341,000
USS Constitution	598,200
USS Cassin Young	368,700
Navy Yard Visitor Center	198,800

Note: **Bolded** sites are located in Charlestown, others are located in Boston.

Major initiatives of the Park include a recent Master Plan for the Freedom Trail that calls for improved signing, displays and interpretive opportunities. A new Visitor Center is being developed at the Bunker Hill Monument, a site that has been isolated from the rest of the Park. Visitation is heaviest during the summer months of June, July and August (42 percent of annual visitation in 1998), and lowest from December through February (nine percent of annual visitation in 1998). Visitation to the Park peaked in July at 447,000 and was at its lowest level in January with 65,000.

The Boston African-American Historic Site is a separate site that is administered by the Boston NHP. It explores the history of Beacon Hill's 19th Century African-American community. The Black Heritage Trail is a walking tour of a number of sites; the most prominent of which is the African-American Meeting House. Visitation to the Boston African-American NHS was estimated at 384,000 during 1998.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

The Boston NHP is served by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, the regional public transportation system for the Boston area. Freedom Trail sites are well served by the three rapid rail transit lines and one light rail line that converge on downtown Boston. In addition, the two major terminal stations of the Metropolitan Boston Transit Authority (MBTA) commuter rail system, North Station and South Station are

located within walking distance of the Freedom Trail sites. MBTA bus service, suburban express bus service, intercity bus service and AMTRAK service are all available as well.

The Charlestown sites are also served by the MBTA, but the service in that neighborhood is less frequent than in the downtown and far more difficult for tourists to utilize. The Navy Yard and Bunker Hill Monument are both relatively long walks from the MBTA Orange Line stations in Charlestown. Local bus service is available but is oriented toward neighborhood residents, not the tourist market.

The MBTA also provides water transportation to Pier 4, which is located in the Navy Yard, and is about a five-minute walk from the Park. Service is provided to and from Long Wharf, which is located in the heart of the downtown, and Lovejoy Wharf, which is located near North Station. The service was originally provided for the growing population of Navy Yard residents, but has become increasingly popular with Park visitors. Park management indicates that many visitors who walk across the Charlestown Bridge from Boston to the Navy Yard do not want to walk back due to the distance and the lack of a good pedestrian environment on the Charlestown Bridge. Park personnel have been guiding these visitors to Pier 4 for their return trip, and increasing numbers of tourists have been using the service from the Boston side as well. The dock area at Pier 4 is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Pier 4, Charlestown Navy Yard



While there are no surveys on the trip purpose of Pier 4 commuter boat passengers, Park personnel indicated that in peak season, 30 percent to 50 percent of riders may be using

the service to reach the Navy Yard portion of the Park. Annual ridership on Pier 4 commuter boats is 384,000.

Private tour boat services also provide direct access to the Navy Yard, via Pier 1, which is located beside the Cassin Young. The two lines that use Pier 1, Massachusetts Bay Lines and Boston Harbor Cruises, together carried approximately 36,000 passengers to the Navy Yard during 1999. A picture of the temporary dock now in use at Pier 1 is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Pier 1 Docking Facility, Charlestown Navy Yard



Private tour services also comprise an important portion of existing Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) usage at the Boston NHP. Historic rubber-tired trolley tours are a popular method of sightseeing in downtown Boston. Four private trolley companies provide service to the Navy Yard with annual ridership of over 347,000. In addition, over 154,000 persons arrive annually at the Navy Yard via tour bus. The visitation pattern for tour bus patrons is somewhat different than for other visitors, with nearly half of all tour bus passengers arriving in September and October.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

A number of additional ATS needs for the Boston NHP have been identified. These needs address both water and surface transportation and address the needs of a variety of attractions within the Park:

- **Expanded Ferry Service at Pier 1 in the Navy Yard** – The current docking facility at Pier 1 is limited and difficult to use. The NPS would like an improved docking facility at this location that could serve both additional harbor cruise traffic and at least a portion of the commuter boat traffic. An additional need is a “Freedom Trail ferry” that would provide a more attractive and direct connection from the North End to the Navy Yard than the current Freedom Trail route across the Charlestown Bridge
- **Pier 2 Rehabilitation and Docking Facility** – The NPS would also like to provide docking facilities at Pier 2 in the Navy Yard. The primary purpose of this facility would be to serve as a gateway to the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area, but it could also be used as a commuter boat facility. Currently the only service to the Harbor Islands from Boston goes from Long Wharf, where both dock space, land-side ticketing/informational areas are very difficult to obtain.
- **Dedicated Freedom Trail Trolley** – While there are a number of private trolley services that provide tours in downtown Boston, none specifically follow the Freedom Trail or dedicate their tours solely to the Park’s historic sites. A 1996 Master Plan for the Freedom Trail called for a dedicated service to be run in partnership with the Freedom Trail Foundation. The NPS is currently working with the Foundation and the Old Town Trolley Company to implement this service. A tour fee will be charged with revenues to be shared among the Freedom trail sites.
- **Boston African-American National Historic Site** – This site is still in the developmental stage and plans are being developed for additional wayside and interpretive information. The NPS has identified a need for a small tour vehicle that can be used to provide site tours. A smaller vehicle is needed because of the narrow streets and limited available parking on Beacon Hill.
- **Improved Bus Parking Area in Navy Yard** – Tour buses operate in the Navy Yard but the current arrangement is not satisfactory. While there is adequate room for buses to turn, part of the area is still an active Navy Yard, creating safety issues and pedestrian conflicts. During periods of peak activity, buses tax the capacity of the Navy Yard and detract from the Visitor experience. The NPS is looking for a staging area outside of the main Yard, possibly in conjunction with new development taking place in Charlestown’s City Square.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The alternatives described above have a variety of objectives. The Freedom Trail sites are well served by existing public transportation but have suffered from lack of a coherent image. The proposed Freedom Trail trolley will help to provide a strong link between sites in addition to a high-quality interpretive experience for the visitor. The trolley will also provide improved access to the Bunker Hill Monument and permit more visitors to benefit from the new Visitor Center. Development of a tourist shuttle service for the Boston African-American NHS would have similar benefits for a site that is not currently well known and needs a more coherent identity with the public.

Proposals for improved water transportation between Boston and the Navy Yard could provide a number of benefits. The current walk across the Charlestown Bridge between Copp's Hill in the North End and the Navy Yard is circuitous and is the least pedestrian-friendly portion of the Freedom Trail. Partial replacement of this link with ferry service would improve the visitor experience and provide an additional opportunity for interpretation, since this service roughly follows the route of Paul Revere's crossing from the North End to Charlestown. Improvements to Piers 1 and 2 in the Navy Yard would make the area an integral part of Boston's growing Inner Harbor transportation system. A direct link to the Boston Harbor Islands would help to increase visitation to both the Boston NHP and the Boston Harbor Islands National Park Area.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

David Dixon/Goody Clancy, *The Freedom Trail: A Framework for the Future*, prepared for the National Park Service, May 1996.

Boston National Historical Park Visitation Reports, 1996-1999.

Richard E. Hangen and Associates, Inc., *Transportation Study*, prepared for Boston National Historical Park, May 1981.

<http://www.nps.gov/boston/>.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Peter Steele, Boston National Historical Park

Bill Foley, Boston National Historical Park